

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 22, 2010

WASHINGTON - The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) commends Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's publicly criticizing attacks on religious groups today in Hanoi, urging the Vietnamese government to address religious freedom and other human rights concerns.

"Secretary Clinton's statements are so very welcome and important, and we are hopeful that the Administration will look carefully at our recommendation to name Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC), a designation that, in the past, produced tangible religious improvements without hindering progress on other bilateral interests," said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair.

The 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) requires that the United States designate as CPCs those countries whose governments have engaged in or tolerated systematic and egregious violations of the universal right to freedom of religion or belief.

USCIRF recently wrote Assistant Secretary Kurt Campbell urging the Administration to designate Vietnam as a CPC, citing a deteriorating human rights and religious freedom situation since Vietnam joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007. In the past year, the Vietnamese government has forcibly disbanded the Buddhist order associated with Thich Nhat Hanh, allowing the beating of monks and nuns and subjecting some to degrading treatment while in custody. Dozens of ethnic minority Protestants in the Central Highlands were detained for "independent" religious activity and new converts to Protestantism in the Northwest Provinces have faced discrimination and threats unless they renounce their faith. Continued

property disputes between the government and Vietnamese Catholics have led to harassment, threats, and some detentions. In addition, the government intimidates and detains human rights defenders, lawyers, and religious leaders who peacefully speak out about legal reforms and human rights and religious freedom, including Thich Quang Do, Nguyen Van Dai, Nguyen Thi Hong, Fr. Phan Van Loi, and Le Cong Dinh. Dozens of individuals continue to be imprisoned or detained for their peaceful religious activity or religious freedom advocacy; police and government officials are not held fully accountable for abuses targeting religious communities; and independent religious activity remains illegal and actively suppressed.

“Trade should not be promoted at the expense of human rights. Secretary Clinton's statements reinforce that point, and we are hopeful that U.S. policy will fully support those individuals, such as Fr. Ly, Nguyen Van Dai, Thich Quang Do, Le Thi Cong Nhan, Fr. Phan Van Loi, Pham Hong Son, Le Cong Dinh and many others who suffer imprisonment and harassment for peacefully advocating for religious freedom and related human rights,” said Leo.

USCIRF has traveled to Vietnam four times since 2003. In its May, 2010 Annual Report the Commission offers information about religious freedom conditions in Vietnam in the past year.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner contact Tom Carter, Communications Director at 202-538-2044  
or [tcarter@uscirf.gov](mailto:tcarter@uscirf.gov).